

To whom it may concern:

2/15/13

My name is James Burnes, and I am a graduate of the "Father for Life" program.

Upon hearing that the "Father for Life" program was taken out of the budget left me feeling both empty and challenged. I felt compelled to share the significance of having such a program in place for men like myself, and men who have both a desire and a willingness to be prominent figures in their children's lives. Unfortunately, and much to my dismay, it is not that simple. Having a desire and willingness is certainly essential. In fact, it is the nucleus in achieving our objectives. (As role models, and good fathers) Essentially, people who have always been in their children's lives do not necessarily understand the psychological and emotional affects that exist when you are a non-custodial parent.

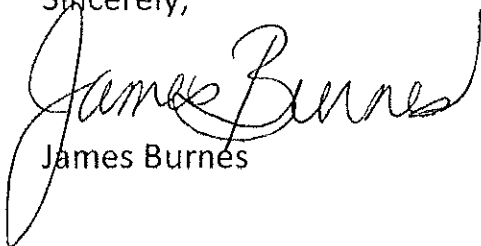
The low-self esteem, the self loathing, the inability to articulate the seriousness of what you are feeling, or the trust issues that tend to arise due to all these mixed emotions. Such things make the reality of our personal perspectives null and void for fear of rejection or disappointment. Please believe me that this is only a small fraction of the equation. When I found out about Fathers for life, I just happened to be at the right place at the right time. I arrived at the program frustrated, confused and with a small amount of faith in the process. Please keep in mind that I am in a heated battle with DCF at the time and I had no one in which to confer. I have had doors closed in my face because I was only doing what I believed was the right thing to do as a father. Doing a great deal of what many men have wanted to do. However, I became frustrated with all that I have mentioned thus far.

I learned that there was a double standard. Women could fail many times and with the readily available resources get custody of their children with what seems like minimal effort whereas a man is made to feel inadequate and less than an

unfit father or dead beat dad. Here's the problem, men aren't afforded the same opportunities as the women. Transitional living is almost non-existent for men and their children. If an opportunity does arise, there is so much scrutiny that the man becomes even more frustrated and tired of being told that he cannot do this or that and he gives up. The women keep on benefitting from the very system that tells us no. Fathers for Life has become a safe haven for men and on some occasion women as well. It is a serious and much needed mechanism if men are to have a chance at the same opportunities that have been afforded to the women. If we are ever going to have a chance at achieving our hopes and dreams, we are going to need the Fathers for Life program. We all come aboard wanting and needing education on how to be parents first and then fathers. In most cases, there are those of us that are ahead in other areas where we can certainly use the wisdom of their experiences through group dynamics and the 24/7 dad curriculum.

How are men ever to assume the role of parents and be role models for their children if there are not any programs in place to deal intimately with the issues of reunification or simply trying to get custody of their children. I am a graduate of this program and it saved me from what could have been a very difficult adjustment given my history. After 16 months of commitment and consistency. If I didn't have Fathers for Life, I would be accepting everything that society says I am. As a result of the work I invested in, I now have full custody of my young son and a new appreciation for life and fatherhood.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Burnes". The signature is stylized with a large, looping "J" and a cursive "Burnes".

James Burnes